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To demonstrate how well-selected literature of the second language can play an important role in the curriculum of the fourth-and fifth-year high school School Spanish course and reinforce language learning, an outline for an analysis of the poem "Dedalo" by Jaime Torres Bodet is presented. Steps in this analysis include explanations of the significance of the title, a summary statement of the central theme, an exploration of the peom's surface meaning and metaphorical meaning, grammatical and external analyses, and a brief discussion of the poem's lasting value. Some suggestions on the selection of reading materials are also included. (AF)

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INTRODUCTION TO LITERARY ANALYSIS: ITS PLACE IN THE HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM

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NOW THAT FOURTH year Spanish in the high school is here to stay and fifth year Spanish is rapidly finding a place in the high school curriculum,[1] several questions arise that need answers. One of the main questions is how to teach literature at that age and intelligence level, maintain interest and succeed in creating not only interest but enthusiasm as well.

Our intent here is to try to show how literature can be made meaningful and enjoyable to this group of youngsters. Throughout our presentation we will keep in mind these questions which should be ever present in the classroom situation.

(1) What shall be the criteria for our selection of reading material?
(2) Does our presentation allow for individual interest and intellectual capacity?
(3) How far can we lead each student and how much can we demand of him/her?

Criteria

Selection of reading materials in the past has too frequently ignored the reader's needs: little thought was given to the age group and its particular group problems. Too often the selections presented for study were works or parts of works of all genres which have heretofore been declared masterpieces of Spanish literature. Such a declaration has neither been questioned nor explained, but merely accepted as a *fait accompli* because the authorities said so.

We do not intend to take the authorities to task, but rather caution the teacher and the text book writer as to the selections to be included in an advanced reader or anthology for fourth- and fifth-year high school Spanish. For example, it is not unusual to include romantic, overly sentimental stories or poems in the reader. Many students find such themes not only cloying and incredible, but "yecch." All we can say to the student is that the work is a masterpiece, and instead of creating interest we do a disservice to Spanish letters; we harm it because the student's reaction is "If that's the best Spanish letters can do, let them keep it." We forget too soon that for most romantic themes and many human ones we needed many years of experience, many ups and downs in order to enjoy if not appreciate this type of literature.

When we select materials, let us think about the problems of the teenager, problems that prevail and are no less human. For our presentation we have selected a poem with the forever timely theme "Man in search of himself."

Presentation of material

For our purpose we will use the poem "Dédalo" by Jaime Torres Bodet.

DÉDALO
Enterrado vivo
en un infinito
dédalo de espejos,
me oigo, me sigo
me busco en el liso
muro del silencio.

Pero no me encuentro.

Palpo, escucho, miro.
por todos los ecos
de este laberinto,
un acento mío
está pretendiendo
llegar a mi oído . . .

Pero no lo advierto.

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Alguien está preso
aquí en este frío
lúcido recinto,
dédalo de espejos . . .
Alguien, al que imito.
Si se va, me alejo.
Si regresa, vuelvo.
Si se duerme, sueño.
"¿Eres tú?" me digo . . .

Pero no contesto.

Perseguido, herido
por el mismo acento
—que no sé si es mío—
contra el eco mismo
del mismo recuerdo,
en este infinito
dédalo de espejos
enterrado vivo.

The steps for literary analysis follow. The order is not necessarily rigid, however, since it may be altered and any one step may be left out when not applicable to the text in question or based on the students' capabilities.

I. Significance, importance and relation of the title to the poem.

II. Summary statement of the central theme.

III. Exposition of the content in a way that clearly delineates the why's of the interpretation.
   (a) To the extent that is possible, explain the content on the surface plane: semantic-grammatical.
   (b) Then to the extent that is possible, explain the content on the metaphorical plane.

   (For an analysis in depth one should take into account the totality of the author's work, of his contemporaries, the literary trends not only of the moment, but of all times).

IV. Based on the exposition of the content, explain the structure of the poem and the importance said structure has in the development of the poem.
   (a) Grammatical analysis: What importance does it have in the development of the theme?
   (b) External analysis—metrics (type of strophe, rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, liaison, enjambment, repetition, etc.): What importance does it have in the development of the theme?

V. What are the permanent values of the work?

To the question, "Is this not too ambitious a program for high school students?" our reply would be, "Not at all if we consider that the type of students that reach the fourth and fifth year of Spanish constitute a very capable select group." Furthermore, some of the things proposed here are already done in the third- and fourth-year high school English classes. At this level, the student should be challenged, not spoon-fed. He is ready to try new things as he seeks answers to his problems.

Quite often we think that the poet writes on inspiration alone. To us this means that he is suddenly hit by some inspiration, that he sits down with paper and pen and jots down the substance of the inspiration as the flow from his pen gives form to the poem. This may appear to be true on the surface, but only too often, the idea of the inspiration has been germinating in the poet's mind and only when it has jelled does he see fit to jot it down. This means that his mind has been constantly at work and the relationship that we find in the work between words, the development of ideas, the peculiar syntax, the images created, the rhyme, the whole structure of the poem, etc. are not at all accidental coincidences, but a carefully planned mental structure which does not come to life on paper until it is nigh perfect according to the poet's standards.

I. SIGNIFICANCE OF TITLE

Usually, the title of a poem falls into one of three categories: (1) it may be a title that catches the eye, (2) or merely the first verse, or (3) it defines the content of the poem. The latter is the case in point.

"Dédalo" is significant since it means a labyrinth, *laberinto* which appears on the tenth verse. But let us see how much more exacting it really is, merely by looking it up in the dictionary and comparing it with the surface meaning later on. *Dédalo* equals English 'Daedalus' and we find the following definition: "A hero of legends and tales. He was the architect who built the labyrinth for King Minos of Crete. Imprisoned in it himself, Daedalus fashioned wings for himself and his son Icarus and escaped to Sicily."

Dédalo in this case means precisely a man-made labyrinth which holds him prisoner. *Laberinto* in the Spanish dictionary also gives an alternate definition as follows: "a poetic composition in which the verses can be read backwards and forwards." This has some relevance to the totality of the poetic structure of the poem. Up to this point the student will have learned at least the usefulness of the dictionary.

II. SUMMARY STATEMENT

To formulate a summary statement of the central theme, it is supposed that the poem has been read several times. There can be different ways of expressing the thematic content and varying degrees of exactness. Which is the most exact is a matter of individual viewpoint; therefore, no one summary is the only one possible. In this case the title has already thrown some light on the subject. Here the thematic content is: "Man in search of himself," "Man seeking his own identity," "Man in search of an explanation for his existence and the futility of this quest."

If this is as far as some students go, they will have accomplished a lot. It is most likely, however, that their imagination has caught fire and they wish to proceed more in depth, so the teacher must at least work in detail through the surface meaning which is our next probable step.

IIIA. SURFACE PLANE

What is surface meaning? Though not easy to define, high school English students are familiar with the term as it is applied in their literature classes, and its further use in studying Spanish poetry simply makes the concept more meaningful. Herein we merely look for the meaning on the surface without digging for hidden meanings. We take words to represent their most common dictionary or syntactic meaning, providing that the result is a meaningful whole. It is at this level that greater uniformity can be expected as to the interpretation by several people. Let us now analyze the poem on this level.

The first stanza which consists of six verses followed by an independent verse which could w ll be the conclusion of the six verses, sets the scene of the whole poem. Though the description is brief,

> Enterrado vivo
> en un infinito
> dédalo de espejos,

a thousand words could not be as expressive when one gives each word its full measure.

The meaning of *dédalo* was already explained on discussing the title. Here we find this prison is made of mirrors. To give the word *infinito* its full value, we have to bring to mind an everyday occurrence. As a general rule when we go to purchase a suit or a dress, we try on the garment and if it seems to please us, the clerk asks us to get in front of the mirrors, usually three panels, in order to see every possible angle for proper fitting. If for a moment we forget about the garment and glance into the mirror we see the repetition of successive images of ourselves *ad infinitum*. So in this context *infinito* merely gives us the impression that the enclosure

of the prison walls may form a square or an octagon, etc. The important thing is that its reflection creates an infinite repetition of the image within.

Now, who or what is the image within? The first verse might be misleading, but not when corroborated by the next three verses which depict the first person or the author as being the image interred within.

me oigo, me sigo
me busco en el liso
muro del silencio.

Here, too, we find our scene more clearly described as a smooth wall of silence. Now we can complete the scene, claim it to be a prison with smooth silent mirrors. Why silent? Because the infinite reflections cannot speak. The author brings into play the audio and visual senses. The *muro de silencio* cancels out the audio *me oigo*. Though *me sigo* and *me busco* in context are visual, they are cancelled out by the author's desperate conclusion,

Pero no me encuentro.

Thus far, this stanza in itself is a gem and could be considered a whole poem. This in itself summarizes the whole content of the poem, but the author must try to find himself through other means.

The author now looks to the tactile as well as the audio and visual senses for an answer.

Palpo, escucho, miro.
por todos los ecos
de este laberinto,

The word *ecos* adds a new dimension to the prison scene of the first stanza. This time it emphasizes the audio aspect judging by the dictionary definition of echo: "The repetition of a sound caused by reflection of sound waves." Nevertheless, repetition is a fundamental aspect of *infinito* as well, therefore, *eco* is tantamount to *infinito*. The word *eco* with other meanings will gain greater significance in the last stanza.

Still searching and emphasizing the audio aspect, the author continues:

un acento mío
está pretendiendo
llegar a mi oído . . .

Here the author is conscious of a sensorial suggestion of a distinguishing characteristic *(acento)* of himself, but which eludes him thus forcing him to speak of it, if not negatively, at least in uncertain terms. He brings to conclusion this stanza with no solution:

Pero no lo advierto.

because of his unawareness of the distinguishing characteristic, it escapes him. He simply feels incapable of this awareness.

Having thus far failed to identify himself, the author seeks more tangible proof of his identity. As it were, he attempts to detach himself and observe someone else imprisoned in the same enclosure making full use of the effects of the mirrors to find himself.

The first four verses of this third stanza add still another sensorial dimension to the description of the scene of the first stanza.

Alguien está preso
aquí en este frío
lúcido recinto,
dédalo de espejos . . .

In this brilliant and possibly dazzling enclosure, the adjective *frío* is of greater importance and will become more apparent on the metaphorical plane. Believing he imitates someone, the author states:

Alguien, al que imito
Si se va, me alejo.
Si regresa, vuelvo.
Si se duerme, sueño.
"¿Eres tú?" me digo . . .

The full use of mirror images and movements are self-explained if one merely faces a mirror and moves towards it or away from it. The importance of these actions, however, is an attempt to identify himself with that someone in the mirror, with "you" as an intermediary, that is why he says: "Is it you?" instead of "Who is it?" and being unable to detach himself, he adds, *me digo* . . .

Again the ominous conclusion in the independent verse,

Pero no contesto.

shows for the third time failure to find an answer, in this case acknowledging the fact that he himself cannot answer.

In the last stanza, the author adds yet another dimension (mental) to the prison scene of the first stanza which he repeats here in inverse order to conclude his poem.

Perseguido, herido
por el mismo acento
—que no sé si es mío—
contra el eco mismo
del mismo recuerdo,
en este infinito
dédalo de espejos
enterrado vivo.

The author desperately expresses definite doubt that the accent that eluded him in the second stanza was his at all. But of greater significance is the inevitable oblivion expressed by the full meaning of the very echo of the memory itself. This can better be understood if we look at the mythological nymph by that name who pined away for love of Narcissus until nothing was left of her but her voice. Here it expresses the gradual inevitable progression leading into forgetfulness and the failure to find his identity. This futility of it all is made much more conclusive by ending the poem with the same verses with which he started the poem. The poem has come full circle, thus closing the door.

A language student who has covered this much ground has come a long way, and no more need be asked of him/her. However, there are those few gifted students, perhaps not gifted nor overly intelligent, but imaginative, who still seek more out of literature and we should not disappoint them. For that reason we now proceed with the metaphorical analysis.

IIIb. Metaphorical Plane

What is metaphorical meaning? This concept is perhaps more difficult to define than surface meaning. More difficult we say because to comprehend its full significance, the reader must have a certain amount of imagination as well as the ability to apply acquired knowledge to different if not alien situations, thus making contradictory if not impossible situations become plausible within a given context. Metaphorical meaning, therefore, is the many possible suggested meanings beyond the dictionary meaning, but usually within the realm of man's possible experience. This meaning may depend not necessarily on the individual use of a given word, but on the context in which it is found and on the images it elicits.

We will not attempt to itemize the different types of possible metaphors. Suffice it to say that for our purpose the metaphorical meaning is merely a possible second more profound meaning other than the surface meaning; concretely, in this case, a much more down to earth concern.

On this level of explication, there is bound to be less agreement than on the surface level. So much the better, because the beauty of good literature is the constant change of possible interpretations. Each reader should find a particular affinity to his own existence, and his interpretation should be colored by it.

This part of the analysis by nature is briefer than the surface analysis since we merely build on the latter, but placing things in the proper perspective.

The meaning and function of the title as explained before is quite adequate. What will become clearer later, however, is the specific labyrinth to which it refers.

In the first stanza we could attach more significance to the verse *muro de silencio* if we found another meaning for *espejos*. True, a mirror is a mirror, but more important, what do we see in them? Ourselves. And who are we? Human beings. Therefore, *espejos* equals people. Thus the wall that forms the perimeter of the labyrinth is composed of people and by extension, it is the world we live in. *Silencio*, therefore, specifies the fact that though human beings are outwardly alike, communication is not always possible, there-

fore, it is the silence which prevents the author from finding himself.

The second stanza shows the author still in search of his identity. This time he touches, listens and looks at every echo within the labyrinth. But what are these echoes? If we refer to the first stanza explained above on both planes, we have to arrive at the conclusion that "echoes" is another word for "mirrors." But why? Simply because the mirrors so placed produced an infinite number of images, that is, repeated the same image *ad infinitum* and the most basic quality of an echo is its repetition *ad infinitum*. Consequently, here again, *ecos* equals men or mankind and the prison where he hopes to find his identity is still the world that surrounds him.

The fact that he is imprisoned is clearly expressed for the first time in the third stanza, but he claims it to be someone else, since it is by identifying himself with someone else that he hopes to find himself.

This attempt also fails since he finds people *(espejos)* not only removed, unapproachable, cold *(frío)*, but his world dazzling or blinding *(lúcido)*, as the enclosure is described. The actions involved become mental as well as physical because, to paraphrase him: "as he *(alguien)* leaves, so do I distance myself from him; as he returns, so do I approach him; and if he sleeps, I wonder *(sueño)* what it is all about and I ask him, 'Is it you?' but I cannot answer myself because I don't know."

The first five verses of the last stanza can be left on the surface plane since its strongest import is its face value, and only the mirrors converted into people remind us it is still the world and people surrounding us that hold us prisoners even while we presume to be alive. The ending with the same three verses as the beginning completes the full circle and shows the futility of the quest. Man will never know who he really is!

IVA. GRAMMATICAL ANALYSIS

There are really no unusual peculiarities on the grammatical level. The syntax is for a fact quite simple, and for that reason it is a most appropriate poem for the task on hand. We do note, however, that the first half of the first three stanzas is mostly descriptive of the same labyrinth and the second half of the three stanzas shows mostly action. Furthermore, these actions which seem to create the feeling of monotony as well as desperation are the effect of brief but significant verbal phrases–

me oigo, me sigo
me busco . . . . . .
Palpo, escucho, miro.
Si se va, me alejo.
Si regresa, vuelvo.
Si se duerme, sueño.

–of the first three stanzas respectively. The last stanza, on the other hand, with the participal forms,

Perseguido, herido

becomes timeless, thus suggesting resignation. The last stanza perforce is the reverse, action comes first, and the description concludes the poem.

A closer look bares the planned or forced symmetry of the first and last stanza. Both stanzas begin with a participial form, *Enterrado vivo* and *Perseguido, herido*. In addition, they have an adjectival function in the beginning of each stanza and a verbal function at the end of the last stanza.

Of greater semantic and syntactic significance, however, are the first three verses and the last three of the poem which are identical and almost in perfect symmetry, but in reverse order. We have come full circle, and the grammatical structure is attuned to the content figuratively and literally speaking. The author has come full circle in his search and realizes the futility of his search. The full circle is symbolically the perimeter of his prison.

IVB. EXTERNAL ANALYSIS

The poem is composed of four stanzas,

the first three followed by an independent verse that seems to produce a sobering effect. The first two stanzas have six verses each; the third has nine verses and the last has eight verses. The meter might be considered irregular in that it consists of mixed dactylic and trochaic feet. Enjambment is definitely possible to suit the rhythm and the mood of the reader. The verse scheme can be considered perhaps modern, but it really is not free verse, since there is a constant assonance rhyme though not regular of *í-o, é-o*. One could stretch the point and risk verging on the ridiculous by asking if this constant appearance of *o* was not prompted by the full circle in which the author finds himself entrapped?

V. LASTING VALUE

WHAT ARE THE LASTING VALUES of the poem? There is no doubt that the thematic content is of permanent universal concern, therefore, of lasting value, but aside from this, the greatest value of the poem is the manner in which the theme was expressed and developed; the beautiful images metaphorical or otherwise created in such a simple form; the beauty of possible multiple interpretations that incite the never ending quest, Who am I? What am I? Why?

NOTE

[1]What we present here is applicable to beginning literature classes at all levels of education.

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